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ABSTRACT

A library module skills development component that acquaints students with the organization and location of materials in the library has been developed as part of a coordinated core curriculum for academically deficient students requiring compensatory course work in the social sciences and the humanities. The library sessions, conducted by the librarian and attended by the instructors and students, instruct the students in the usage of "Library of Congress Subject Headings," the card catalog, and periodical indexes, which the student must use in order to write a two paragraph paper relating information found in one source to information found in another. A sample topic is researched to demonstrate library skills and a sample report is distributed which illustrates proper writing, footnote, and bibliographic style. Although vigorous evaluative measures have not been applied, a reading of the completed student papers and a later survey of the student's impression of the library module's impact on their subsequent coursework suggest that the program has a positive influence. Not only have their reading and writing skills improved, but also their abilities to synthesize ideas. A reduced anxiety level concerning library usage has contributed to the development of basic skill levels in library research practices. (PPB)

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DEVELOPING A LIBRARY MODULE FOR A COMPENSATORY SECTION
OF A SOCIAL SCIENCE CORE COURSE

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(Abstract)

The new core curriculum at Herbert H. Lehman College of the City University of New York includes a skills development component along with an extended social sciences or humanities course in a coordinated program for students requiring compensatory courses. A library module designed to teach students to associate ideas in periodical and monographic literature, and to communicate them in writing a minipaper, was planned by the social science course instructor in cooperation with a librarian and the students' remedial reading instructor. Two class sessions in the library, attended by the instructors, and conducted by the librarian, acquainted students with the organization and location of required materials. Student reaction the following term suggests that the assignment helped them in their current coursework as well.

Effective education involves the integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills with mastery of content. As one progresses academically, it should also include the learning of library utilization and library research skills.

The new curriculum instituted in the Fall of 1984 at Herbert H. Lehman College is intended to provide freshman and sophomores with a general base of knowledge and intellectual capacities. It requires that core and distribution content courses in the arts and sciences incorporate regular components that contribute to the advancement and reinforcement of comprehension and communication abilities, including specific assignments which necessitate students' use of the library.

As other colleges and universities in recent years -- indeed, under CUNY's Open Admissions Program, to a greater extent than many -- Lehman College has admitted increased numbers of students who suffer deficiencies in academic skills. The instructors of such students have faced a special challenge in trying to help them acquire comprehension and communication capabilities which allow them to learn and to discourse about college-level subject matter with college-level competence. Lehman's new curriculum provides a skills development program for incoming students who have failed one or more of the CUNY Skills Assessment Tests.

In the Fall 1984 semester students who had failed both the Reading and the Writing Assessment Tests were assigned to one of several coordinated programs or "blocks" of compensatory courses. This included a remedial reading and writing course, a basic logic course, a counselling component, and an extended (two-semester, rather than the regular one-semester) core course in a liberal arts content area,

e.g., humanities or social sciences. The purpose of each block, in which instructors were to work as a team, was to furnish a more integrated learning experience and support system for the students.¹

PURPOSES AND DESCRIPTION OF THE LIBRARY MODULE

The instructor of an extended core course in social science (Lally) worked with a librarian (Wortzel) and the reading skills instructor of his block (Pace) to develop an introductory library module. The three of us attempted jointly to design a set of class sessions and exercises that would be both suitable and useful for our students, who not only were deficient in academic skills, but also generally had minimal knowledge of the library, its resources and its uses. We wanted the library module to serve the students' need to discover ideas and to learn to connect and organize them and communicate the result in writing -- which in this context is the basis for library research papers. We also wanted to link the library module directly to the social science course, the one college content-area course these students were taking, so that the library work would seem more relevant and realistic to them.

Previous efforts in college library instruction which had been described in the literature, particularly two relating to sociology, provided useful models and ideas.² However, the facts that our students were in a compensatory or remedial program, that the content course dealt with several social sciences rather than just sociology, and that our time constraints seemed more severe than those of the authors of the earlier efforts (although we had the advantage of dividing the class-time needed between two courses), made our case different and indicated the need for a tailor-made instructional

production.

The details of the library module produced as the result of our collaboration were as follows:

After consultation with the skills instructor and the librarian, the social science instructor gave an assignment that required each student to locate in the college's library one journal article and one book on a specific social science topic provided to her or him, and to write a two-paragraph "minipaper," including two footnotes and a two-item bibliography.

By lottery each of the 22 students was assigned a different social science topic, e.g., juvenile delinquency, air pollution, mental illness, unemployment -- each "in the United States." It was decided that this technique would reduce plagiarism between students and help ensure that each student would personally experience the various steps necessary to turn out the final product of a minipaper. It would also alleviate the problem of more than one student wanting to use the same drawer of the card catalog or volume of a periodical index at the same time. Nonetheless, students were encouraged to cooperate in helping each other to understand the assignment and learn the mechanics of using the library to find books and journal articles relevant to their topics. Prior to the lottery, to help increase our students' chances of success in their search and to be fair to each of them, the librarian had checked that the Lehman College Library had sufficient books and journal articles available for each of the 22 topics and that the wording of each topic conformed to the Library of Congress Subject Headings, card catalog, and periodical index usage. Given the introductory nature of the library module and the course focus on

social science, only one periodical index, the Social Sciences Index, was to be used.

The written instructions given to students were:

1) In the main stacks of the Lehman College Library find a book (other than an encyclopedia or a textbook), published since 1960, that contains information on the topic assigned to you. From the book select some one point of information that relates to the topic and that you think is important and interesting. 2) In the periodical section of the Library locate a journal article (not a popular magazine article), published since 1973, that deals with the same topic. Find a point of information in the article that is related to the point you chose in the book. 3) Write a "report" of two paragraphs, in which you integrate or connect the point from the book with the point from the article. Include proper footnotes and bibliography, as well as title or cover page. The report is to be typed appropriately....You are to attach, as an appendix to the report, photocopies of the title page and one page to which you have referred in your footnotes, for both the book and the journal article....(Note: You may first find an appropriate journal article and then find a related book, if you prefer.)

The social science instructor orally suggested that students each find three or four books that seemed relevant to their topics, which -- unlike periodicals -- they would be permitted to check out of the library, so they could examine them more leisurely and conveniently and increase the likelihood of discovering appropriate points of information regarding their topics. (This would also teach them the basic library procedure of checking books out, if they were not already familiar with it.) In addition, the instructor stressed that, in writing their reports, the students should attempt to paraphrase, rather than quote, the points from the book and the journal article which they were synthesizing. This was an ability which many of the students had found difficult to acquire, although the block had provided some practice in it. Also, the students were encouraged to write at least two drafts of their reports, to edit them, and

carefully to proofread and correct the final typewritten copies before submitting them.

The class was told that the reports would be graded on a ten-point scale, which would take into account the quality of the content and composition of the report; proper form and correct punctuation, especially regarding footnotes, bibliography and cover page; neatness; and inclusion of the required photocopies of pages from the book and the article. The last requirement was to make sure that the students actually searched out and used the sources they referred to in their footnotes, rather than used references to those sources obtained from textbooks, encyclopedias, etc., without going to the sources themselves. These library minipapers, the class was told, would be worth 10 percent of the final grade in the social science core course. (The instructor, not knowing what results to expect from this assignment, previously untried with our students, hesitated to give it a greater weight. Our judgment now is that next time it should be valued at 15 or 20 percent.)

Finally, the social science instructor distributed to the class a sample report, complete with cover page, footnotes and bibliography, which he had composed on a topic not included among the 22 assigned to the class. This was meant to complement the more abstract written and oral instructions with a concrete example of the kind of product the students were expected to hand in.

The next two one-hour class sessions in the social science course, after the one in which the instructions for the minipaper had been given, were held in the library. The librarian presented appropriate explanations of the uses of the library. The social science professor

participated in both sessions as an auxiliary instructor, both supplementing the librarian's presentation in minor ways and helping to answer students' questions. The skills instructor attended the first class.

The first session began at the main card catalog. With the aid of two handouts, the librarian discussed the use of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, the card catalog, and the Library of Congress call numbers as means to locate books on various subjects in the library. He concretized his explanations and made them directly pertinent to the students' assignment by searching for the library's holdings on a social science topic not included among the 22 given to the class. The remainder of the session involved the students in a trip to the library's stacks to actually locate books found in the catalog regarding the topic. The absence of a wanted book from the shelves led to a brief discussion of the procedure to follow in such an event.

The second library class was held in the periodicals room. The librarian explained the difference between books and periodical literature, and between professional journals and popular magazines. He discussed the use of periodical indexes and abstracts, focusing on the Social Sciences Index for the minipaper assignment. To facilitate its examination, the students were each given photocopies of the same two pages taken from the index, designed for practice in identifying journal articles on a designated topic. The social science topic that had been researched by way of illustration for the card catalog was used again. Next, the class was taught how to locate relevant materials in the periodicals section of the Lehman College Library --

current issues; earlier, (often) bound materials; and, briefly, microform materials. Finally, students were allowed to use the available periodicals tools to begin searching for journal articles on their assigned topics. Once again both trial and error, success and failure became instructive.

On one of the days the library sessions were held, the skills instructor devoted one of her classes to discussion of and practice in the employment of footnotes and bibliography in library research papers. She distributed and referred to a one-page guide to footnotes and bibliography, that had been prepared by the librarian in consultation with her and the social science instructor. This abbreviated guide was based upon Turabian's A Manual for Writers...(which, however, was made available to students, if they wished to use it, at the library's ready reference desk). It included illustrations of the most common cases of footnote and bibliographic forms that the students would be likely to need. During this session and in the subsequent class hour students were asked to apply what they had just learned about documentation to the books and articles they had already found on the topics for their reports. A review of paraphrasing was provided in response to difficulties experienced by the students.

The reports were due two weeks from the day they had been assigned in the social science course, and eleven days after the second class of instruction in the library. The library module took approximately three and one half class hours of the social science core course: two hours in the library and the rest of the time during parts of different classes -- for assignment of the minipaper, suggestions and

answers to questions as they arose while the students were preparing it, and going over results. Approximately three hours of the skills course were used: two hours for discussion of and practice in the use of footnotes and bibliography, and the last hour in responding to students' questions stemming from their reports. Although impossible to estimate more precisely, a notable amount of time was also given to answering students' questions out of class, especially in the library by the librarian and his assistants during the period when the reports were being prepared.

EVALUATION

Although we do not have rigorous measures for evaluation of the library module, there have been sufficient indications to convince us that it was a successful assignment, especially in light of the fact that the students involved had failed both the entrance reading and writing assessment tests.

First, we noted that the students showed an unusually high level of enthusiasm and involvement while engaged in the various instructional and practice activities in the library, as well as in the research required for preparation of their individual minipapers. Furthermore, on their forms for evaluation of the social science course, answered anonymously by them in class at the end of the semester, 18 of the 21 students who responded checked off that the lectures and assignment on use of the library's resources were "very worthwhile;" the other three checked off "somewhat worthwhile;" none, "not worthwhile." These figures stood out favorably in comparison to the class' evaluation of other course components inquired about. Finally, every student completed the minipaper assignment -- 18 of 22 of them, on time.

We suspect that these very positive reactions of the class to the library module resulted, at least partly, from the congruence of the assignment with the needs of these students. It took them out of their regular classrooms -- associated with less prestigious remedial and compensatory courses -- into an academic library environment. There, each of them could and should search for information and ideas, discover connections, and personally produce a "scholarly work" of his or her own. This very probably symbolized to most of them the kind of "real" college-level experience for which they had come to Lehman and for which they longed, but which as yet they had tasted relatively little of because of their placement in a program, of necessity largely remedial and compensatory. Also, the students' exceptionally positive reactions were very likely influenced by their perception of the cooperation among their instructors, a common feature of the blocked program, but in this case more pronounced and also made more visible by the joint presence of all three of us instructors involved. This may have served to indicate to the students the importance of the library module to the instructors, and to enhance their sense of support from the faculty.

A second kind of indicator of the success of the library module is provided by the research reports submitted by the students. Examination of these minipapers suggested that the students generally had learned the basics they had been taught about library research. The majority of the reports were fairly good. In particular, they showed that most of the class was able to discover and connect relevant points of information and ideas from library sources. The most common shortcomings involved weaknesses in composition and

organization, resorting to quoting the published materials (generally without quotation marks) instead of paraphrasing as had been requested, and incorrect form or punctuation in footnotes and bibliography. These kinds of problems were endemic to the student population in the blocked program, had been addressed and worked with during the term, and obviously needed continued, and perhaps additional attention and work in future semesters. Nevertheless, the level of difficulty of most of the published materials used for the reports by the students and the newness to them of many of the required procedures undoubtedly aggravated the situation.

Finally, an incomplete survey at the end of the semester following that in which the library module had been given can be taken as suggestive. It showed that at least some of the students believed the library-minipaper assignment had helped them in their coursework or assignments during that most recent term. This supports a finding from an earlier study of college library instruction that "knowledge about the research process and library utilization does generalize, and that the information is immediately helpful in other classes as well."³

Although these results of the library module are generally gratifying, our experience in implementing it has made us aware of a number of modifications that would be desirable for the next time. For example, it would seem important to introduce students to the utility of encyclopedias, handbooks, and specialized bibliographies for discovering references to the most important or pertinent works on a topic. In principle, they are the most efficient places "to start undergraduate research on an unfamiliar topic," before going to the

subject index of a library's card catalog.⁴ However, given the limited time we felt we could spare for the library module in our crowded curriculum and considering the lack of familiarity our students had with the main sections of a library, we opted to concentrate on exposing them to the card catalog, the periodicals section, and the corresponding stacks. It may be that in the future we should squeeze in an extra class hour for the library module, which could be devoted largely to use of the additional library research aids (although there might also be brief mention of such matters as computer-based literature searching, or the need to narrow and focus a topic or problem into a manageable subject for a paper).

CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of any need for minor revisions, we believe the library module worked well for our purposes with our particular population of academically deficient students. Its benefits clearly outweighed its costs in time and efforts expended.⁵

Our students had been introduced to main resources and tools of the library as well as to their manipulation and exploration, first through instruction and practice, and then through the experience of producing their own minipapers. In the process they had become enthusiastically involved in the discovery and synthesis of ideas as well as in the strengthening of their own listening, reading, writing, and (informally even) speaking skills.

Insofar as we can judge from their reactions, comments and minipapers, for most students the library module probably reduced any fears and anxieties they might have had about the library by

increasing their familiarity with it. Apparently, it helped develop, or reinforced fundamental library research capabilities -- which are generalizable to other courses and constitute the basis for authentic term papers requiring the use of the library. (If instructors of upper-level courses perceive that students are more prepared for such assignments, more of them may begin assigning them once again.) Finally, the library module may have contributed in a small way to our students' self-confidence and self-image as college students, to their enjoyment of that role, and to their engagement in the quest for knowledge.

For these various reasons, we hope library modules similar to ours, but adapted to local circumstances, will become regular components of more lower-level programs in colleges with student populations similar to ours.⁶ However, let it be emphasized that the library module and its positive results would have been unlikely, if not impossible, without the interdisciplinary collaboration of faculty -- who also enjoyed and profited from the experience.

REFERENCES

¹In the Fall 1985 semester the organization of remedial, compensatory and blocked courses, as well as the criteria for assignment to them was modified somewhat.

²Kristin McDonough and Barbara K. Rothman, "The Library Research Module in Introductory Sociology: The Case Study of a Collaboration," Research Strategies 1 (Summer 1983): 109-117; and Linda Saltzman, "Library Usage and Sociological Resource Materials: The Value of Integrated Instruction," American Sociological Association Teaching Newsletter, 9 (June 1984): 8-10. For further references see Martin Leavy, "Library Instruction in Sociology: A Beginning Bibliography," ASA Teaching Newsletter, 10 (April 1985):2-4.

³Saltzman, p. 9.

⁴McDonough and Rothman, p. 111.

⁵As just one specific, practical point in reference to such costs, the social science instructor found that the minipapers - - each consisting of two paragraphs with two footnotes, two bibliographical entries and attached photocopies of four pages of the sources used - - were relatively easy to grade, even though they were on 22 different topics.

⁶Copies of the list of social science topics used for our library assignment, the brief one-page guide to footnotes and bibliography, and the sample minipaper will be sent upon request. Please write to: Professor John Lally, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Lehman College, Bedford Park Blvd. West, Bronx, NY 10468.